



RCD Outlook 2003

FEBRUARY 2003

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1

Nevada County RCD's No-Till Drill Soil Conservation Outreach Program

In 2002, the Department of Conservation awarded the Nevada County Resource Conservation District \$17,349 to purchase a no-till drill and to conduct outreach activities throughout the district. A company located in the Central Valley manufactured the drill and delivered it in October. This could not have occurred without NRCS, RCD directors and staff, Cyndi Brinkhurst - project coordinator, and other partners. Working as a team, the group conducted extensive research and eventually decided on a manufacturer who could build a quality no-till drill that met the RCD's specific needs. So what is a no-till drill?

It is an 8-foot wide farm implement that deposits both seed and fertilizer in one pass. It provides farmers with an alternative to conventional tillage, which requires two or three passes through a field. Pulled behind a tractor or a 4 x 4 truck, the no-till drill deposits seed and fertilizer in grooves, which it cuts into the soil. Before using the no-till drill, the landowner sprays the area with a non-selective herbicide. The existing vegetation provides a natural cover for the seeds. The no-till drill saves time, energy, and labor; assists in controlling weeds; decreases soil erosion; conserves water; and enhances crop production.



Nevada County RCD's new no-till drill in action

The Nevada County RCD has had a successful no-till drill program for the past 11 years. For more than a decade, the RCD was able to provide local landowners with an effective method of fertilizing and seeding their property. The benefits to the local community were significant. Unfortunately, the old drill was rapidly wearing out and a new one was needed. In early 2002, the RCD was notified that they had been awarded a grant by the Department of Conservation to purchase a new no-till drill. The new no-till drill was an immediate hit.

Numerous landowners wanted the opportunity to rent it. However before it could be used, the no-till drill needed to be calibrated and tested. A local landowner volunteered to use the equipment on his property. The no-till drill performed superbly and was now ready for its debut.

The RCD delivered the no-till drill to the first renter who received both verbal and written instructions on how to use the equipment. The first landowner, in his eighties (shown above), hooked up his Ford tractor, which was built in the 1960's, and began seeding/

Continued on Page 6

An RCD Success Story: Central Modoc RCD

After years of planning and groundwork, the Central Modoc River Center is scheduled to open in the next few months. The Central Modoc RCD has been the driving force behind the development of the River Center, which will focus on issues associated with the Pit River Watershed. Study and stewardship of the Pit River are primary interests of the RCD. The River Center will be open to the public early this year. This achievement represents many hours of hard work on the part of the RCD staff, directors and the district's many cooperating individuals and agencies. The center will be a central location for Pit River educational events and information. Construction is currently underway on interactive displays that will provide information about the river and watershed stewardship. One of the main goals of the center is to give local students and community members valuable hands on learning opportunities. Paula Fields, the River Center coordinator, is based at the center. When the center opens, she will be available



The River Center, Alturas CA

to facilitate discussions, conduct demonstrations, and lead hands on activities related to the health of the river.

Paula is one of three full time Central Modoc staff members. Other staff members include Cliff Harvey, CMRCD Watershed Coordinator, and Laura Shinn, who handles most aspects of the RCD's business management. The RCD recently hired a new curriculum development staff member and plans to hire a new project coordinator soon.

Additional work-study watershed monitoring interns and temporary project crews also help with the work. In the past, the district barely had enough money for one employee. Now they are struggling to find enough office space to support the growing program. In addition to the full time staff, the district acts as the fiscal agent for the Pit River Watershed Alliance Watershed Coordinator and summer staff for the Modoc Noxious Weed Working Group. The district has experienced tremendous growth in just the past few years and the River Center is just one example of its many successful conservation efforts. Last year, the RCD's watershed coordinator helped landowners improve fencing on their properties, reduce bank erosion, and implement revegetation projects.

The RCD's success is a result of several factors. First, it has a highly committed board of directors that is genuinely interested in improving the resources within their district. The Board of Directors is inspired by the belief that the community should be responsible for its own destiny and should self-regulate. According to the Central Modoc RCD board, "The RCDs are in a good position. They are autonomous and have no ties, one way or the other, except for strong conservation." This puts RCDs in the ideal position to provide the community with technical assistance and education.

In addition to having a committed board of directors, the RCD also has a very hard

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

working staff. According to the directors, “the staff was there to help the board implement the vision they had for the RCD”. During the past few years the staff was instrumental in securing over \$1,500,000 in grant and in-kind funding for projects within the district, including the River Center. The staff has also provided education and technical assistance to several landowners within the district.

Another key element of the RCD’s success is that the directors and the staff have worked to develop strong partnerships within their district. These partnerships have helped the RCD gain community support. The RCD works closely with the county, NRCS, the Modoc County Weed Management Area, the Modoc National Wildlife Refuge, the Pit River Tribe, and many others. The RCD has further developed and strengthened its partnerships through its involvement with the Pit River Alliance. The Alliance is a collaborative effort between the



The Pit River, Modoc County

RC&D, several RCDs, NRCS, USFS, Ducks Unlimited, irrigation water users groups, private landowners and many others. The Alliance was designed to “strengthen individual stakeholder efforts through enhanced coordination.” (Pit River Alliance website)

Finally, another step that contributed to the RCD’s success was developing a business plan. A few years ago the directors attended a training session where they developed a Business Plan.

Developing a plan helped them focus their efforts and clarify the district’s goals. This in turn helped

the district gain support for their goals and has proven to be instrumental in the successful development of grant proposals. The district continues to successfully secure funding to support and expand projects such as the River Center, the Upper Pit River Watershed Enhancement and Protection Project, and many others.

The RCD’s Business Plan contains the following goals:

- To facilitate the sound management of our natural resources through local control.
- To foster partnerships that achieve integrated long-term cultural, economic, and environmental health of our watershed.
- To implement conservation projects with willing landowners.
- To educate landowners and the general public about sustainable resource management.

With the technical assistance the RCD provides through the Watershed Enhancement and Protection Project, the partnerships they have developed, and the education they provide at the River Center, the RCD has made remarkable progress towards achieving their goals. Through their commitment, hard work, partnerships, and vision, the RCD is bound to be even more successful the years to come.

Written by Jenny Pickel, Resource Specialist

Planning: Help We Need a Plan (part II)

In the last newsletter we discussed the benefits of having a strategic plan. As Central Modoc RCD has shown, having a solid plan in place can lead to support from your county, your community, state and federal agencies, and others as well. The last article also covered conducting an internal/external assessment of your RCD and developing a mission statement. Completing these steps should provide the answer to the question, "Where are we now?"

The next phase of the planning process involves answering the question, "Where do we want to be?" The first step in this phase is to develop a vision. A vision is "a compelling, conceptual, vivid image of the desired future." (Dept. of Finance, Strategic Planning Guidelines) You can think of the vision as an ideal picture of what you think the district should look like. A vision is a statement of the preferred future. For example, a portion of Western Shasta RCD's vision statement reads : "The Western Shasta Resource Conservation District: Is the leading point of contact for conservation and restoration efforts in Shasta County." To read their vision statement and their plan in it's entirety, visit the CARCD Watershed Information Sharing Project at: <http://carcd.org/wisp/> and click on Western Shasta RCD. A good way to start developing a vision is to answer the question: What is it you want others to see when they look at the district and its programs ten years (or more) from now?

The next step is to prioritize important issues the district wants to address. Using information gathered in the internal/external assessment that occurred during phase one, the RCD should decide which issues are a priority for the district. Once the issues have been prioritized, the district can develop goals and objectives intended to address the district's priorities.

Goals are the end result the district would like to achieve on a specific issue. You can think of goals as a big picture statement about the solution to an issue. Goals are generally achieved in the long term. For example, a goal might be to eradicate all yellow star thistle within the district. This is an activity that will likely take several years and involve many steps. Objectives, on the other hand, should be achieved in the near term. Furthermore, they are critical components necessary for achieving the goal. In the star thistle eradication example, an objective might be to eradicate starthistle along a road within the district. Eradicating starthistle along this one road is a smaller step that must be taken in order to reach the goal of eradicating the weed from the entire district. Another objective might be to increase the awareness of the starthistle problem within the community. Each goal should have one or more objectives. It's important not to confuse objectives with methods. An objective is a measurable statement of a desired outcome and does not include a description of how the outcome will be achieved.

Once you have developed your vision, goals, and objectives, you are ready to move on to the next phase. The third phase answers the question, "How do we get there?" It is during this phase that you will describe your methods and develop an action plan for achieving your goals. We will discuss phase three in the next newsletter.

Permitting: Turning Simple into Complicated, Part III

Picking up where we left off in the previous article, we have a small bank erosion problem that we're trying to fix. We have submitted an application for a special development permit to the county planning department for review. We have been informed that the project does not qualify for an exemption from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and that the planner is preparing an initial study. What can we expect now?

An important step in the environmental review process is completion of the initial study. The initial study is a preliminary analysis prepared by the lead agency to determine whether an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) or Negative Declaration is needed. Most folks know what an EIR is just from its name, but the meaning of Negative Declaration is less apparent. In simple terms, it is the lead agency declaring that there will be no significant environmental impacts resulting from the proposed project.



To make this finding, the lead agency completes an Initial Study, which consists of a set of environmental factors the lead agency must consider when determining the project's impacts. The State CEQA Guidelines, which are adopted by the Resources Agency and are the primary rules and source of interpretation of CEQA, recommend that these factors include: aesthetics, agriculture resources, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning policies, mineral resources, noise, population and housing, public services, recreation, transportation and traffic, utilities and service systems, and a final category titled mandatory findings of significance. A lead agency may add additional environmental factors that are unique to its jurisdiction.

In most cases, the Initial Study takes the form of a checklist, although a lead agency can use a different format of its choosing. For each environmental factor, several questions are considered. For example, under agriculture resources, the lead agency must determine if the project would: a) convert prime farmland, unique farmland or farmland of statewide importance, as shown on maps prepared by the Department of Conservation, to non-agricultural use; b) conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract; and c) involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland, to non-agricultural use.

Each of these questions requires a response, of which the lead agency has four options. The lead agency can determine that the project will have no impact, a less than significant impact, a less than significant impact with mitigation or a potentially significant impact. As the applicant, we would prefer either of the first two choices since that means the project may be approved as proposed. The third choice means that the project may require some redesign or that mitigation measures will be required as part of the permit approval. If any of the responses result in a determination that the project has a potentially significant impact, an EIR must be prepared before the project can be approved. For our example, we'll assume that there will be no impacts that cannot be reduced to a level less than significant with mitigation.

Continued on Page 7

Upcoming Workshops!

This Spring/Summer the RCD Assistance Program staff will be teaming up with the Resources Agency Legacy Project to conduct workshops throughout the state. All workshops will include a training session relevant to RCD activities and a session on the Legacy Project to give participants the chance to identify resource concerns within their region.

Workshops are tentatively scheduled as follows:

<u>Location</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>
• San Luis Obispo	March 6, 2003	Grant Writing, Cost Share Assistance
• Modesto	March 20, 2003	Permitting, Cost Share Assistance
• Bishop	April 17, 2002	To Be Determined
• Coachella Valley	May 1, 2003	Permitting, Cost Share Assistance
• Yreka	May 22, 2003	Permitting, Cost Share Assistance
• Alturas	June 5, 2003	Permitting, Cost Share Assistance

For more information or to reserve a spot at one of these workshops please contact Andrew Rush at 916-323-4163 (arush@consvr.ca.gov) or Jenny Pickel at 916-324-0774 (jpickel@consvr.ca.gov)

Grant Writing Help

Starting this spring, RCD Assistance Program Staff will be available to review your 319(h), 205 (j) and CALFED grant applications. The staff will review your applications and provide you with suggestions where appropriate. Please allow adequate time for review, ideally at least 2 weeks before the application is due. Applications will be reviewed on a first come first serve basis. Contact Jenny at 916-324-0774 or jpickel@consvr.ca.gov for more information.

No-till drill outreach program (cont. from page 1)

fertilizing his property. It was a success. Word of the new drill got around and other landowners contacted the RCD, requesting to rent the no-till drill. The RCD continued to rent out the no-till drill during the fall season. With winter, the equipment was placed in storage. However, many additional landowners have already signed up to use the no-till drill during the spring season.

The No-Till Drill Soil Conservation Outreach Program has been a phenomenal success. It allows the RCD to address a local need by providing farmers with a service that many of them could not have afforded on their own. In addition, it helps protect the environment, conserves water, and reduces the proliferation of noxious weeds. Clearly, the no-till drill is a winner for both the RCD and the community.

Written by Robert Shun, Grant Coordinator

Simple to complicated (cont. from page 5)

In addition to the environmental determinations, the Initial Study must also include a detailed project description, a description of the environmental setting, a discussion of the project's consistency with plans and policies, a list of any proposed mitigation measures, and the names of the preparers.

The Initial Study must explain the factual data or evidence used to reach conclusions regarding the project's potential environmental impacts. An Initial Study that lacks factual support is referred to as a "naked checklist" and is vulnerable to challenge in court. To help gather this information, the planner preparing the Initial Study will consult with other relevant agencies. In many cases this is accomplished by circulating a "project notice" to the reviewing agencies as well as to adjacent property owners. A project notice provides a brief description of the project and its location and requests comments be returned by a specified date (usually within 30 days). Circulation of the project notice typically occurs when the project application is accepted as complete.

When the Initial Study is completed, the lead agency will prepare its environmental finding. This will either be a Negative Declaration, a Mitigated Negative Declaration or that an EIR must be prepared. As discussed above, a Negative Declaration means that our project will not have a significant impact on the environment. A Mitigated Negative Declaration means that our project has the potential for significant environmental impacts, but that redesign and/or mitigation measures applied to the project will lower those impacts to less than significant, thus avoiding an EIR. The finding is normally in the form of a one- to two-page form letter signed by the planning director or other authorized officer of the planning department.

In our example, let's assume the planner finds that a Mitigated Negative Declaration is the appropriate finding. We can now expect a meeting or phone call with the lead agency to discuss proposed mitigation measures or project redesign. Some negotiation of these measures is possible. Once the measures have been agreed to, the lead agency is required to circulate the completed Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration for public review and comment. At this point, the lead agency's environmental finding is considered to be a "proposed" Mitigated Negative Declaration.

Circulation of the Initial Study and proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration is accomplished using a third document known as a Notice of Intent (NOI). The NOI is a cover form used to identify which agencies will receive the Initial Study package, the date comments are due back to the lead agency, the date, time and place of any scheduled public meetings or hearings, and who to contact if there are questions. Copies of all these documents are sent to responsible and trustee agencies and agencies with jurisdiction by law, and to all parties previously requesting notice. Where a state agency is a responsible agency or a trustee agency involvement is required, or where the project is of statewide or regional importance, the Initial Study package is also sent to the State Clearinghouse. The public review period is a minimum of 20 days, and 30 days if a copy is sent to the State Clearinghouse.

We'll pick up from when the Initial Study completes its circulation in the next article.

Written by Andrew Rush, Environmental Specialist

Department of Conservation

801 K Street, MS 13-71
Sacramento CA 95814

Phone: 916-324-0774

Fax: 916-327-3430

Email: rcd@consrv.ca.gov



**It only takes a little
energy to save a lot!**

<http://www.flexyourpower.ca.gov>

Edited by: Jenny Pickel

The RCD Outlook newsletter is intended to provide RCDs with helpful tips and updates on RCD work statewide. If you would like to be added to the mailing list please feel free to call the RCD program staff at 916-324-0774 or send an email to rcd@consrv.ca.gov.